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NPS Community Honors Black History Month

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U.S. Navy photo MC2 Patrick Dionne

NPS Community Honors Black History Month

By MC2 Patrick Dionne

Marilyn Owens, Administrative Support Specialist in the NPS Registrar's Office, stands with several of the posters, figurines and other historical items that she created in support of the NPS multicultural heritage committee's Black History Month celebration in the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Auditorium, Feb. 26. The theme of the annual event focused on African American achievements in a time of war.

"Based on the struggle of black heritage I think that having a voice and reminders of who we are and where we come from is very important," said Owens. "As someone who grew up in an era of discrimination, recognizing the trailblazers who have walked that path and struggled for us, is the least I can do to help educate people on such an important history."

Owens says she was moved to become proactive with the event from her educational research into history, and in particular the story of Barbara Johns. Johns was a civil rights pioneer and a young student who led a student strike protest at R.R. Motion High School. After gaining NAACP legal support, the students filed *Davis v. Prince Edward County*, the largest and only student initiated case consolidated into *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision

declaring "separate but equal" public schools unconstitutional.

“Being in that era, and having walked down that road, I knew what that struggle can be,” said Owens. “Up until junior high school I also attended a segregated school right outside of Tampa, Florida, so I felt a lot of what Johns was feeling, and knowing about someone moving mountains and making a great change by standing up for herself was really inspiring for me.

“If you keep hope alive and be a voice and be committed and stand up for the things you want to see change it can happen,” she continued. “To see the world come so far is such a blessing and shows how much hope can bring a positive change”

The potluck style event was open to all staff, students and faculty and included a variety of food, educational posters and historical items celebrating African American history in times of war. The event was concluded with remarks from Executive Officer of Troops Chief Warrant Officer 5 George Williams.

Williams provided an in-depth look in the discrimination he faced and how the Navy has changed from his beginning as a Seaman Recruit in 1986. Throughout his speech he highlighted the achievements of African Americans throughout the armed forces including Benjamin O. Davis Jr., the first African American Air Force General and Doris Miller, a cook and Petty Officer 3rd class who was noted for his bravery during the Attack on Pearl Harbor. In concluding his remarks Williams noted that he was “one of last ones to serve in an era, because the next person after me didn’t go through that transition,” and though we have come a long way, “It is our duty to not lower our expectations to and do better than the status quo.”

The NPS heritage committee seeks to help the NPS community observe the diverse cultures and backgrounds of today's military.

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